This Monday we began an initiative we’ve been planning for a long time–teaching students about the decision-making process in small groups–as a way to begin thinking about inserting SDM into the transition planning process required by federal law. Instead of telling parents of transition-age youth to get guardianship, we think schools should be focused on enabling students to become Decision-Makers, to recognize the areas where they may need and want support—just as we all do—and to choose supporters who can provide that assistance.

SDMNY Site Coordinator Joan Cornachio and Hunter School of Education Professor Gina Riley have created a 10-week Decision-Making curriculum which they are piloting with Cooke School transition students in the early evening, and Cooke alums in the afternoon.

In the first few weeks, participants will learn about each other’s strengths, how they make choices that lead to decisions, have peer discussions around mapping their decisions, and explore what it means to have support for decision-making. Later in the semester parents and family members will be invited to participate. Although the course will not result in a facilitated SDMA of the kind that we hope will be legally recognized, participants and their supporters may choose to continue on to Phases 2 and 3 of the SDMNY facilitation process.

Joan and Gina are committed to making the classes interactive and experiential; one of their ideas is to end each class with a “Thought for the Week” to encourage participants to take notice of their process as decision-makers.

Every day, take notice of the choices you are making, how you are making those choices, and what/who is shaping or influencing your choices. If you want, you can journal or draw out your ideas to share next week!

We are so excited—and honored—to begin this work with our friends at the Cooke School. We hope it is just the beginning of moving the education system toward incorporating SDM, and promoting everyone’s right to make their own decisions, regardless of disability!